

**Cold Case Task Force Meeting**

**August 4, 2023**

**10:00 AM – 12:00 Noon**

**690 Kipling, ST, Denver, CO 80215**

**Virtual – In Person**

**Attendees:** Director Chris Schaefer, Lou Estrada, Laura Saxton, Francine Gonzales, Silvia Pettem, Sean Gruno, John Kellner, Sarah Chaikin, Kirby Lewis, Byron Kastilahn, Audrey Simkins, Ken Kupfner, Dan Mc Casky, Missy Wood, Tammy Lee, Bernie Sena, Melissa Mc Graw, Michele Kennedy, Benjamin Heisler, Aubrey Branning, Dan Volz, Chief Doug Stephens, Deena Ezzell, Janet Drake, Mark Reeves, Hazel Heckers, Kari Johnson, and Mike Trindle

**Introductions-**

Those in attendance were welcomed by Director Chris Schaefer.

During the last task force meeting there was some discussion about how mental health was being addressed by law enforcement. Several metro agencies now have CO-Responder teams that partner with police officers to address mental health crises that occur in the field. Many of these programs are grant funded.

Today we have a couple of CO-Responders from the Lakewood Police Department in attendance to share with the task force members a little bit about these teams and the impact they are having.

**CO-Responders Presentation-**

CO-Responders Benjamin Heisler and Aubrey Branning from the Lakewood Police Department talked about the program and answered questions from those in attendance regarding the CO-Responder program.

These CO-Responders are activated by the Victim assistance teams often. However, the law enforcement agency may activate them as well. They have a good working relationship with members of law enforcement. They don't have a typical blue uniform they do have a uniform.

How are the CO-Responder Teams activated?

Each jurisdiction is a little different. Some of the teams are allowed to go and visit members of the community that are in treatment programs to check in if there is no criminal element. In Lakewood, the CO-Responders have access to their assigned officer that would be present, so they are not acting alone. In Lakewood, they have 2 Agents with them on initial calls and

sometimes 3 depending on the situation. If the CO-Responder Team already has a standing relationship with the subject, then they may respond with just 1 Agent.

A question was raised regarding the funding of this program. The question was specific to whether the program was a line-item in the budget or if it was grant funded. Program staff are currently employed by Jefferson Center for Mental Health, but this program should be moved in house in the future but that has not happened yet.

Littleton Police Department, Chief Doug Stephens said the program is so valuable law enforcement is prepared to find the funding. There is some grant funding available through the private public health sector. In Littleton and Arapahoe County they do 50/50 funding and the CO-Responders ride in the same cars as the officers. Douglas County alone claims to have saved the county 8 million dollars using this program.

Colorado is at the forefront of the CO-Responder Program across the country. Almost every county in Colorado has at least one CO-Responder team. The use of the team is driven by the county. Public health is the one entity that crosses all jurisdictions, but the teams are usually county wide.

There was some discussion about what a CO-Responder program might look like at the CBI. Not sure since the CBI is a request only agency and we generally work with local law enforcement agencies that may already have a program in their jurisdiction.

The CO-Responder Program has proved to be so valuable that many police departments and sheriff's office are bringing these teams in house and finding creative ways to fund them. This is the case in Arvada and Westminster but other agencies in the area are also talking about this. Rural agencies also have these types of resources, so they can get people on scene within a relatively short period of time.

Director Schaefer expressed his appreciation to both Mr. Heisler and Ms. Branning for their presentation about the CO-Responder Program.

### **CBI Updates -**

#### **Cold Case Database**

The stats reported this month were very similar to those reported last month.

The CBI Missing Person Training will be held in this same room this afternoon from 1:00 PM – 5:00 PM. We currently have a little more than 50 people signed up. We did provide an opportunity for virtual attendance for those outside of the Denver metro area. The training will include the following topics:

- Family Reference Collection
- Dental Records
- Case Investigation
- NamUs

BJA Federal Grants

Applications have been submitted for the following BJA Grants; COLD/SAKI/MUHR. We are waiting to hear if our application was accepted. We expect to hear something later this fall.

Cold Case Review Team

We continue to work with the Boulder Police Department on the presentation of the Ramsey case.

Cold Case Playing Cards

We are working on how to make each playing card appear on the website. I would like to make them flash or shuffle through the deck. We are working on a few ideas.

We still have plenty posters left of Decks 1 – 4 if anyone is interested in hanging them in their lobbies or sub stations.

Missing in Colorado

The Missing in Colorado Event will be held tomorrow Saturday, August 5, 2023, from 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM. The event will be held at the Lowry Conference Center located in Denver.

Chick Fil A has agreed to donate lunch for the family support luncheon as well as all volunteers.

The CBI will provide 5 – 10 FTDNA kits at the event for those in attendance. The event will begin with a short presentation on the topic of Forensic Investigative Genetic Genealogy (FIGG) and how it can be helpful in missing person cases. This presentation is expected to last 20 – 25 minutes.

Forensic Services -

Missy Woods, DNA Scientist Denver, presented the information on behalf of Lisa Yoshida who was unable to attend this meeting

Total Samples Received	8,329 (approx. 2,776 per month)
Number of Samples profiled	5,430 (approx. 1,810 per month)

Of those samples profiled

- Arrestee samples 4,367
- Convicted Offender samples 838

Total number of Offenders 572,212

- Arrestee 357,382
- Convicted Offenders (includes Juvenile Offenders) 214,830

Total CODIS Hits for the Quarter 446 (approx. 149 per month)

195 hits related to property crimes

87 hits related to burglary crimes

58 hits related to sex crimes

17 hits related to homicides

42 hits related to person crimes

29 hits related to robbery crimes

The CBI Laboratory is in the process of validating familial searching in the database. The DNA technical leaders are actively working on the validation now, but it is still a few months out. We anticipate the validation should be completed in January of 2024. This is a high priority for the laboratory.

The Laboratory is also working on the validation of the Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) system. Once the validation is complete, the CBI will be able to generate the SNP file necessary to do FIGG in house. This is a technology that is currently being outsourced. We hope to have the validation completed in January 2024.

Rapid DNA is still being evaluated and improved under the guidance of the FBI.

### **Recent Successes**

John Kellner commented the 18<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Attorney's Office had some recent success with the Aurora Police Department on a 2007 case. The case now has an active warrant for the suspect in this case. However, the location of the suspect is believed to be out of country.

The Denver Police Department's biggest success was being able to get Detective Lou Estrada to the Cold Case Team. It is great to finally have him on the team.

Recent success of a 1994 homicide. The victim in this case was Rita DeJardine. The agency received a CODIS hit in 2018. The prosecution resulted in a 1<sup>st</sup> deg murder conviction in June 2023. This was a huge success with a very intelligent jury. The Defense team threw everything they could out during trial which really slowed the progress but in the end we were successful.

### **Open Forum -**

Thank Lou Estrada for being here today.

Nothing else from the online attendees.

Members of the Task Force would like to see the previously taught Cold Case Training updated and taken forward. Members indicated they would like to see a training class held in April of 2024 in the metro area. It is important to brand the training as new and revised for those who may have attended in years past. We want to make sure that law enforcement knows that strategies and technologies around cold case investigation have changed dramatically since 2018. Free training is always good so if it can be done again that would be great. Several agencies in attendance to include the Boulder District Attorney's Office, are willing to donate investigators and attorneys that have recently investigated cold cases to assist with this training.

We will work to get something scheduled at the Lakewood Police Department in April 2024.

The meeting adjourned at 11:03 AM

### **Next Meeting-**

The next meeting is scheduled to take place on Friday, November 3, 2023. This meeting will be held from 10:00 AM – 12:00 noon. The meeting will be held at 690 Kipling Street in the first-floor conference room.